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NEWS RELEASE

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West Nile Virus Discovered in Eastern Idaho

An unvaccinated horse in eastern Idaho has tested positive for West Nile virus. The Jefferson county animal is the first evidence of West Nile in eastern Idaho this year. So far in 2005, 13 people, 106 horses, 14 birds and one dog have tested positive for West Nile infections in the state. Most of these cases are centered in southwest and south-central Idaho.

“Mosquito activity is beginning to decrease as nighttime temperatures drop, but we still advise people to take precautions to fight the bite of mosquitoes,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist. “Until we have a few hard frosts that kill mosquitoes, West Nile virus is still a threat to our health.”

There have been no human deaths in Idaho from West Nile virus, but nationally 52 people have died from West Nile infections in 2005. So far this year, West Nile virus has been found in 15 Idaho counties that include: Ada, Adams, Blaine, Canyon, Gem, Gooding, Elmore, Jefferson, Jerome, Lincoln, Owyhee, Payette, Twin Falls, Valley and Washington Counties.

West Nile virus was first discovered in the United States in 1999 in the New York City area. Since then, the virus has spread westward and can be found throughout the country. Last year, 11 of Idaho’s 44 counties reported West Nile activity.

(more)

To protect themselves from mosquito bites, Tengelsen advises people to:

- Insect-proof their homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on their property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk; and
- Report dead birds to your local Fish and Game office.

Although West Nile virus does not usually affect most animals, it often causes severe illness in horses and certain species of birds. Although there is not a vaccine available for people or household pets, there are several vaccines for horses. Approximately one-third of horses which contract West Nile virus will die, so horse owners are encouraged to contact their veterinarian about vaccinating their animals. Horse owners who suspect West Nile viral infection in their animal should contact their veterinarian immediately.

Additional information about the virus is available from the Department of Health and Welfare's web site at <http://www.westnile.idaho.gov>. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Urban Pest Management program also has information available on steps to prevent home-grown mosquito infestations. Information is available on ISDA's web site at <http://www.idahoag.us>.

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(Editors: For information about human infection, please contact Tom Shanahan, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, 334-0668 or Geri Rackow, District 7 Health, 522-0310. For additional information about West Nile infections in horses, please contact Wayne Hoffman at the Idaho Department of Agriculture at 332-8671.)